

EURO FOIE GRAS

FÉDÉRATION EUROPÉENNE DU FOIE GRAS

EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR FATTENED PALMIPED* PRODUCTION

In July, 2008, the five European foie gras (fattened goose or duck liver) producing countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, France and Hungary established the European foie gras federation "Euro Foie Gras" in order to make their profession better known, to explain its specificities and implement shared projects that would improve and standardise practices for the entire branch.

EURO FOIE GRAS, concerned about animal well-being, has published a charter of commitments stemming from the experience of breeders who manage this animal husbandry activity, following the 12 principles in the "Welfare Quality Project."

Whereas:

★ *a. Only a few races or descendants of palmipeds carefully chosen throughout many generations are apt to produce foie gras,*

★ *b. In birds as in fish, the principle site for fat, lipids or fatty acids is located in the liver, which naturally plays the role of a storage organ according to a reversible process as it does not lead to any cellular destructuration,*

★ *c. Palmipeds have no sudoriparous glands, and like dogs they evacuate excess heat by panting,*

★ *d. Apart from these physiological specificities, palmipeds present the following anatomical characteristics:*

- Specific morphology of the oral cavity including a possible alignment of the beak and neck because of the absence of a cartilaginous glottis;
- The airway opening is positioned at the lingular level and is closed by lingular reflex which allows these birds to feed under water without food "going the wrong way," thus without drowning;
- Elasticity of the oesophageal walls and constitution of a storage pouch at the bottom of the oesophagus called a "pseudo crop" which allows them to swallow large prey (fish and frogs) or bulky vegetal matter, which are then progressively liberated towards the succenturiate ventricle then the gizzard;

- Existence of a natural protection in the oesophageal walls allowing the harmless ingestion of small stones that participate in grinding food in the gizzard.

★ *e. The only currently controlled method for foie gras production consists of assisted feeding of the palmipeds at the end of the husbandry stage,*

★ *f. Breeders are thus encouraged to maintain their animals in good health and respect their well-being.*

European Union producers have developed specific animal husbandry modes adapted to the species and genotypes, allowing a two-phased foie gras production:

1) The husbandry stage which spans the period from hatching until growth has finished: this concerns the largest part of the husbandry cycle, from ten to fifteen weeks according to the species. It is systematically successful for palmipeds who have free external range access, and

2) The fattening stage which occurs at the end of the husbandry period and which generally lasts from nine to twenty days according to the species.

A transition stage links these two stages to prepare animals for fattening. This consists of getting the animal used to eating at mealtimes, thus enhancing its aptitude to be fattened (elasticity of the oesophagus, food storage and lipid synthesis).

★ **1. Animals must not suffer from long periods of hunger, but must receive appropriate quantity and quality in their diets**

While the animal is being raised, it must have a specific balanced and unlimited diet. This is composed of cereals and proteaginous seeds that are either produced on the farm or purchased through an external supplier; in this case the farmer must ensure the composition of the food which is delivered. During the last few weeks of growth, animals are prepared for the fattening stage by receiving food fractioned into meals which thus stimulates the bulimic instinct of palmipeds.

At the end of their growth period, only robust and healthy animals are fattened. During this stage, palmipeds receive assisted feeding, often consisting of two to four meals per day depending on the species. This progressive feeding is adapted to the capacity of each animal and reproduces the natural process of preparation for migration. The fattening process consists of putting food into the oesophagus and the pseudo crop, an elastic storage pocket located at the base of the neck. To do this, the breeder uses a mouth piece, which is checked at regular intervals, adapted to the anatomical characteristics of each species.

★ **2. Animals must not suffer from thirst and must always have access to water in sufficient quantities**
The palmipeds continually have free access to drinking water.

★ **3. Animals must have a comfortable place to lay down**
When they are young, the animals are placed in a lit, heated and ventilated building and must have a well-maintained area to rest and sleep. As soon as the weather allows, animals have access to an external natural grassland, with good quality earth. While they are being fattened, their housing is equipped with a floor to respect the hygiene and comfort of the animal.

★ **4. Animals must have thermal comfort, meaning they must not be exposed to excessive heat or cold**
Buildings in which young animals are housed are sufficiently heated and ventilated to give the animals the thermal comfort required by their age. In the fattening stage, in order to facilitate the regulation of their body temperature, buildings are ventilated and cooled if necessary. Air quality and circulation (temperature, humidity and flow) are constantly monitored to respect the comfort of the animals.

★ **5. Animals must have enough space to move around freely**

Space for each animal is appropriate and adapted to each stage of growth. As soon as the weather allows, animals have access to an external natural grassland, where they can move about freely. It must be noted however, that the gregarious instinct of palmipeds encourage them to move around or to stay in groups. During fattening, animals must have sufficient space to move naturally or as needed. To accomplish this, European industries are progressively putting in place collective housing.

★ **6. Animals must be free from physical injuries**
Breeders, who are aware of and have been trained in physiological specificities of palmipeds, learn to manipulate the animals safely. In the different stages of the life of the animal and in particular during transport, prophylaxis and assisted feeding, they ensure the quality and upkeep of material in contact with the animals. Farms are monitored by specialised technicians and veterinarians carry out controls to ensure the health of the animals.

★ **7. Animals must be free from illnesses; breeders must ensure proper hygiene and care**

All palmiped breeders, knowing that strict respect of legislation leads to a guarantee of their animals' health which in turn provides high quality products for consumers, care for their animals. The veterinarian in charge of the animal husbandry and/or technician in charge of monitoring carry out controls. A room used as an on-premises air lock is installed at the entrance to avoid external contamination by human beings. Animals requiring special care are managed in strict respect of the legislation and following the directives of the veterinarian in charge.

★ **8. Animals must not suffer from pain caused by care, manipulations, slaughter or inappropriate surgical procedures**

Assisted feeding is carried out using appropriate equipment by competent personnel who understand the physiological characteristics of palmipeds as well as the fattening technique. The breeder employs a regularly verified mouth piece that is adapted to the anatomical characteristics of each species. Beaks are blunted and claws are cut in compliance with the recommendation of the Permanent Committee of the European Council. Before slaughtering, animals receive anaesthesia using well maintained and correctly adjusted equipment.

★ **9. Animals must have the possibility of expressing normal and harmless social behaviour**

Palmipeds are animals that naturally live in a group. The size and density of the group must be compatible with daily human surveillance and meet conditions which preserve the animals' well-being. In order to do this, during the fattening stage, European industries are progressively building collective housing to replace individual housing.

★ **10. Animals must have the possibility of expressing behaviours characteristic of their species**

While they are growing, having access to an adapted external grassland helps the palmipeds explore their natural environment. External livestock watering equipment is placed in a manner to avoid standing water, a potential source of contamination, and is designed to allow animals to express behaviours that are characteristic of their species.

During the fattening stage, collective housing will in particular allow the palmipeds to stand up, to turn around, to spread their wings and to smooth their feathers in compliance with the Permanent Committee of the European Council recommendations.

★ **11. Animals must be carefully manipulated in all situations; manipulators must allow a good man-animal relationship to be established**

Manipulations of the palmipeds while they are being raised will be limited to the strict minimum. The palmipeds will be handled by competent personnel, aware of animal well-being, supervised by the breeder. During handling operations, the breeder implements all necessary means to avoid any trauma for the palmipeds. To do this, it is a good idea to leave a low-voltage light on.

★ **12. Negative emotions such as fear, distress, frustration or apathy should be avoided and positive emotions such as safety and satisfaction should be preferred**

The breeder visits the animals once a day beginning when they are very young. The regular presence of the breeder with his animals also guarantees calm animals. Furthermore, external grasslands will be protected or fenced in to avoid the intrusion of predators.

**ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL
GOOSE AND DUCK FEDERATION**

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